

King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts

Disasters: Are you ready?

Swimming in the Regional Pool

I'd like you close your eyes and imagine in your mind (OK, if you are driving—don't close your eyes) that you are seated on the edge of a very large, even huge concrete swimming pool. Around the waters edge are also seated scores, even hundreds of other individuals, each representing a jurisdiction, a discipline, a private business, non-profit, etc.

There is a shallow end on one end of the pool and a deep end with low and high diving boards mounted on that end.

What I'm painting a picture for you is one I call the "regional pool." This is where people and agencies get involved with one another. Where the exchange of ideas occurs and where people and organizations get to know one another. In order to participate and learn you have to get into the water and swim around. Interdependencies will not be discovered by sitting on the edge and watching others.

Hopefully all of us have experience with a "swimming pool" and perhaps there is multitude of approaches to how you get into the water. There are those who dangle a foot or toe to test the temperature of the water, before deciding to enter the pool. There are others who start at the shallow end and wade in slowly in order to get use to the water's temperature. Then there are the hearty souls who run or dive headfirst into the deep end with not a thought to what the experience will be like.

My question for you is "Where are you today?" Are you on the edge of the regional pool, watching others interact and become involved. Perhaps dangling a toe in the water of regional planning by attending a meeting or exercise. Could you be the person or organization that is a bit suspicious of the water in the pool and are choosing to wade slowly into becoming involved in regional activities.

As I look around I see people and organizations already in the pool, interacting with one another, learning and becoming better prepared for the next disaster, be it big or small. Some have been in the regional water so long they are starting to look like prunes, water logged and crinkly from the experience—but ah, they are the ones who will be most prepared, with relationships already in place and limited surprises when disaster does strike.

I encourage you wherever you are along the pools edge, wading in or even now doing a cannon ball off the high dive, get involved in the regional process wherever you live and work. It will make for a more effective regional response for the future. It will maximize the ability of your organization to survive and thrive in a post event environment. And, when everyone is interacting in a coordinated regional manner we'll all look like prunes and be better for it!